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THE PURPOSE AND METHOD
OF THE
BRAHMAVIDYA ASHRAMA

By C. JINARAJADASA, M.A.

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The Brahma-vidya Ashrama, Adyar, Madras, is a school for the synthetical study of universal knowledge and culture on the principle that these, in their racial, religious, national, local and individual aspects, are essentially related and mutually illuminating expressions of one Cosmic Life. It is at present restricted in residential membership to Fellows of The Theosophical Society, but others may attend the lectures. Full particulars may be had on application to the Principal.

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BY

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THE OPENING LECTURE OF
THE FOURTH SESSION OF
THE BRAHMAVIDYA ASHRAMA,
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THIS morning we begin the regular lecture work of the fourth session of the Brahmavidya Ashrama, and in entering this new lecture-hall we are taking up once again the ancient Indian ideal of life of the student, with its close association with the things of nature. We have on our left the river, in front the lotus pond, and on all sides palm-trees and shrubs. These give to our work the intimate touch of nature. I am happy that we begin this new session of this nucleus of the World University (as it has been declared to be by the Masters of the Wisdom) in such beautiful surroundings.

Thinking of the work of the Brahmavidya Ashrama, I am reminded how profoundly I was impressed twenty-five years ago by a vision of the past and the future which was seen by one of our Theosophical investigators. Soon after Christianity was founded, He who built it up, the then disciple Jesus, was born later as Apollonius of Tyana, a teacher of Greece and Rome. From Greece He was called by His

occult chieftains to India, where the Maha-Chohan of the time was living. Apollonius was given an insight into the future, and he was then charged with the work of preparing the western world for a great philosophical era which was to come nearly two thousand years later. What specially impressed me was that the Maha-Chohan saw the coming of the Dark Ages over Europe, followed by modern science and a slow return to the light, and that He was planning even then to bring about in Europe and America a new era in philosophy that would be characteristic of Greece at its best period. The work of Apollonius was to establish magnetic centres to help in the work of the new age.

In the days of ancient Greece, every one who was cultured had the philosophical sense, with a deep spirit of enquiry into all things in heaven and earth. Whether a man was a soldier, a politician or a merchant, he was always trying to find the essential unity of things. It was the restoration of this philosophical attitude that Apollonius was to work towards, a spirit of broad and scientific inquiry into divine problems, distinct from the merely religious faith held by men and women. Something of the "sweetness and light" of Greece was to be brought back to the western world,

and something of the realization of the Atman to the eastern, and with this intention there was planned the coming of The Theosophical Society and the revival of the Ancient Wisdom through its means.

This is the ideal of the Brahmaidya Ashrama.

In modern life we have a great deal of knowledge, but very little vision. Science has ramified into so many divisions that only by special effort can a vision be attained of all its achievements and of its true direction. This is because while in science we have many facts, we have not a framework to give cohesion to them. From lack of this framework there is a disjointedness in western intellectual life. In India we have such a framework in the general philosophical conception of things, but even in India few are fully aware of its value.

But we each need to have a framework of things for ourselves. We cannot be efficient unless at the back of effort there is a definite framework of thought. This can be worked up partly from the outside. There are many philosophical schemes which one can examine, and from which each can select according to his temperament what has the greatest appeal to him. Theosophy is such a scheme. It presents to the intellect a unique view of things. But

one cannot come to the highest efficiency by merely professing belief in something presented from without—even if such were presented directly by a Master of the Wisdom. Real efficiency only comes through the power and insight derived from a construction which we make from within ourselves. As we accept a system from outside, we must find it inside also; without an inner system, the outer system is merely a label.

Our aim in the Brahmavidya Ashrama is not so much to give its students a system which will be their profession of faith, as to help them to make their own system. The whole course of studies is intended to rouse their own inner synthesis as soon as possible. It is a school to engender and diffuse many types of philosophy in the world. I hope that, as the decades pass, we shall have many schools of thought arising in the East and West, in Europe, America and Australia, as a result of the influence of students of the World University. The Ashrama is intended to be a place for the provision of the intellectual and æsthetical materials out of which the students will build up their own edifice of thought.

It is impossible to find this universal culture necessary for an individual to-day, if one limits oneself to the ordinary universities. That is

where such work as that of the new World University, of which the Brahmavidya Ashrama is a nucleus, will have a beneficial part to play in the education of the future. To-day amongst people of education, we find brilliant brains and profound learning, but we do not find the absolutely necessary spirit of synthesis. In most universities there is no attention paid to mysticism, except in a purely intellectual way. The religious spirit is practically absent; in India all the religions are actually barred from the universities. There are no bridges in our colleges to-day between religion and science, or between science and philosophy. It is much the same with art. The artists of the past were closely allied to the spirit of religion, and in Greece to science and to philosophy. But to-day the artist lives a life apart from these things. Within the last fifty years the great department of Anthropology has risen—the understanding of the structural basis underlying the development of humanity; but it is a dry, purely intellectual, and sceptical kind of study. Its books send you away with a sense of disgust at the superstitions of humanity, rather than give you an inspiration and confidence in its spiritual advance. There is another unrelated department of modern life, that observable in the development of business organisation, especially as

seen in western lands. This too has its cultural value, and the business man, as well as the scientist and philosopher, will contribute to the synthesis of knowledge.

With so many departments of life challenging the attention, it is almost impossible to get to the centre from the isolated segments of the circle. There are no roads open between them; each has to cut his own path from the circumference to the centre. Yet there can be no real efficiency until one stands in the centre. The aim of the Brahmavidya Ashrama is to bring its students to the centre, by giving them the principal facts concerning the various departments of knowledge, and by presenting the facts in such a way that a vision of the synthesis underlying them will be born in the students. Its studies are arranged with a view to awakening the intuition. Its intention is not merely to impart knowledge, but to induce the synthetic faculty. No topic is outside the study of the Ashrama, and through the variety of its studies the student will find his own way to the centre.

There is another reason why such work as that of the Brahmavidya Ashrama and the World University is essential to-day. More and more the sense of the world as a unity is growing in the minds of cultured people. We are passing away from the limitations of nationalism, while

retaining national patriotism. Circumstances are forcing us away from the purely national standpoint and from its cultural exclusiveness. A world stand-point becomes more and more necessary to each of us. Such a University as that whose foundations have been laid in this Ashrama was bound to come, if not from The Theosophical Society, then without it. Almost simultaneously with the starting of the Brahma-vidya Ashrama, Rabindranath Tagore started the Visvabharati in Bengal. In Vienna in 1923, during the Theosophical Convention, we found that some Austrian enthusiasts had started the idea of a World University. The germs of another has existed in an international library of all culture, the Palais Mondial, started in Brussels. The time is ripe for the conception. We Theosophists will, on the whole, make a better success of our scheme, because there are more of us from more nations in the world to work together than there are in other similar movements elsewhere. We have forty-one nations as Sections of The Theosophical Society, all working for Brotherhood, and all willing to present the best of each to all.

It is only through the drawing of the people into this larger world-consciousness that we shall be able to minimise the bitter struggle for existence which is ruining civilisation to-day.

A fierce greed for life is being fostered by machinery and inventions. People are being induced to live feverishly, and in a spirit of ruthless competition. The spirit of the brute in human affairs is stronger to-day than it was centuries ago. The powers of Nature which science has released are being unscrupulously used for ignoble purposes. The exploitation of man by man is more widespread than it was before the rise of modern civilisation. The craving for response to the outer is obviously increasing with each generation, and the struggle for existence is becoming fiercer and fiercer. There is only one way of minimising this state of things; it is by giving, as compensation for the claims of the outer world, the sense of an inner world. By the development of the intuition we can teach the leaders of the nations to live the true simple life, so that instead of craving for a multitude of possessions they will seek the joys of an inner peace, and so lessen the sharpness of the struggle for existence for the masses. In ancient India, the man of the highest culture, the true Brahmana, was the man who owned practically nothing, but he was honoured because he sought the joys of the inner world and not the outer.

This seems the only way out of the tangle of modern civilisation. If only the ideals of the

inner life can prevail, then slowly mankind will turn away from this feverish search for excitement, and find the real world in their own hearts and intuitions. Men will cease to trample on each other when they realise that there are possessions of the spirit infinitely more valuable than those of the material world.

It is at these things that we are aiming in the Brahmavidya Ashrama. Our work here is only a symbol of the great world-work to be done generation after generation. We have the blessing of Those who lead humanity. It is ours here to concentrate on our own part of the world-work, and to see that we do thoroughly a work which we can pass on to the generations to come.

I welcome the new students who have just come from England, South America, South Africa, Italy, Denmark and Holland to join their fellow-students who have already come from other countries.

May the Blessing of the Brotherhood rest on you all.

THE BRAHMAVIDYA LIBRARY.

1. **BRAHMAVIDYA**, by Annie Besant, D.L., P. T. S. Cloth Re. 1-8. The six Inaugural Lectures of the Brahmagvidya Ashrama, Adyar, October 2, 1922, with a Preface by S. Subramania Iyer, LL.D. A survey of the field of synthetical study as differential manifestations of the Cosmic Life.
2. **THE ASHRAMA IDEAL**, by G. S. Arundale, LIT. D., M.A., LL.B., F. R. Hist. S. As. 3. The opening lecture of the Second Session of the Brahmagvidya Ashrama, October 2, 1923. An exposition of the principles and methods of the Brahmagvidya Ashrama as an aid to individual expansion and the better service of humanity.
3. **THE PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY**, by James H. Cousins, D. LIT., Principal of the Brahmagvidya Ashrama. Cloth and Ink, Re. 1-4. Based on lectures given in the Brahmagvidya Ashrama, and in the post-graduate courses of the Universities of Calcutta and Mysore. A critical survey of western æsthetics and a presentation of the heretofore unrecognized Indian Philosophy of Beauty with a view to a future æsthetical synthesis.
4. **GNOSTICISM**, by Mary W. Barrie, M.A. Illustrated with numerous diagrams. Wrapper Re. 1-4. Boards Re. 1-8. Cloth Rs. 2. Based on lectures given in the Brahmagvidya Ashrama. Gnosticism, hitherto misunderstood because looked at only in its external elaborations, is in this book shown to be a synthesis of related truths drawn from Chaldean, Egyptian, Grecian and Hebraic sources and assimilated with the fundamental truths of Christianity.
5. **THE GROWTH OF CIVILISATION**, by B. Rajagopalan, M.A. Boards Re. 1-4. Cloth Re. 1-12. Lectures delivered in the Brahmagvidya Ashrama, setting out the nature of civilisation and the conditions of its growth; and surveying the development of civilisation in its western and eastern aspects.

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